



National/Community Service and Veterans and Military Families: Programs, Evidence, and Possibilities

1) What are the benefits of volunteering/national service for veterans and military families?

Service is innate to military personnel and veterans. After all, it is their zest for serving that draws them to serve their country. The 2015 Veterans Civic Health Index report¹ indicates that veterans a) tend to volunteer more hours annually than non-veterans, and b) are more likely than non-veterans to be regular volunteers. Young veterans, or veterans aged 20-49, are reported to have the highest rate of volunteering among all Americans¹. The mission of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering². National and community service can provide a pathway for veterans and military personnel to find purpose and meaningfulness in their daily lives back home. For example, the sidebar shows a quote from the report, *All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*³ that showcases how volunteering and civic engagement can serve as

"Until I started with The Mission Continues I was having a hard time with myself. I felt like I was a failure, I felt that I didn't get to finish my mission because I was medically evacuated before my unit came home. It was hard for me to believe that I could do something. I just felt sorry for myself and fell into this depression, thinking that something that I loved to do so much had to stop. I loved being a soldier, I always loved helping others, and I was great where I was at, at that point in my life. But things changed, and I was just willing to give up. My son gave me the encouragement not to give up, and The Mission Continues made it possible for me to take the first step forward.

Seeing the difference that one person can make to a child's life has given me the greatest motivation and the strength to keep going, just knowing that someone out there is counting on me, it means the world to me."

Sonia Meneses, OIF Veteran

*All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*³

¹ <https://gotyour6.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Veterans-Civic-Health-Index-2015.pdf>

² <https://www.nationalservice.gov/about/who-we-are>

³ http://www.civcenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/all_volunteer_force.pdf

the conduit to successful reentry into civilian life. Their data also show that veterans who volunteered, reported more successful transitions to civilian life than veterans who did not volunteer³. Additionally, if the service opportunities are tailored to capitalize on skills gained through military service, paving the way to later potential employment, it would fill an important economic need as well.

2) What are current CNCS programs serving veterans and military families?

Since the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, CNCS has strived to better serve veterans and military families, prioritizing them for recruitment as national service participants and as beneficiaries of national service programs. We list below a snapshot of CNCS funded programming for veterans and military families alongside the focus areas outlined in the legislation. Information listed below, and additional information can be found in the 2015 Report on Veterans and Military Families and the Corporation for National and Community Service⁴.

a. Veterans

- i. Volunteer Opportunities for Veterans. *Recruit veterans, particularly returning veterans, into service opportunities, including opportunities that utilize their military experience.* National service projects help returning service members find a sense of connection and belonging by giving them another opportunity to serve their country. This provides them a much-needed sense of connection to the community. CNCS supports 15 grantees who are focused on providing volunteer opportunities for veterans.
- ii. Education and Certifications. *Assist veterans in developing their educational opportunities, coordinating activities with and assisting state and local agencies administering veterans' education benefits.* CNCS supports 27 grantees that offer advice, tutoring, internships and/or vocational training that could lead to full-time employment.
- iii. Employment. *Coordinate activities with and assist entities administering veterans' programs with internships and fellowships that could lead to employment in the private and public sectors.* AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members help veterans write resumes, navigate the steps along the path of seeking employment, locate available resources, and offer professional training programs and job-seeking and retention service and support. CNCS supports 38 such grantees.

⁴ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/Veterans-and-Military-Families>

- iv. Wounded Warriors. *Develop projects to assist veterans with disabilities, unemployed veterans, older veterans, and veterans in rural communities, including assisting them with transportation.* National service programs help disabled veterans access medical service, and also connect them with service opportunities. CNCS funds 17 grantees providing transportation to Wounded Warriors.

b. Military Families

- i. Services and Support to Military Families. *CNCS will promote community-based efforts to meet the unique needs of military families while a family member is deployed and upon that family member's return home.* CNCS grantees provide school work help for children of military families, as well as re-entry help for returning service members.
- ii. Access to Benefits. *Promote efforts within a community to serve the needs of veterans and active duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces, including helping veterans file benefits claims, and assisting federal agencies in providing services to veterans.* CNCS supports 19 grantees that help veterans understand the complex process of filing claims, and provides veterans and military families with information on available benefits and services, and guides them through the process.
- iii. Military Children. *Provide mentoring to military children, including assisting veterans in developing mentoring relationships with economically disadvantaged students.* CNCS grantees provide mentoring to children of military families, to help them adapt to the absence of a deployed parent. CNCS supports 19 grantees running youth mentoring programs focusing on helping military and disadvantaged youth.
- iv. Wellness and Other Support Services. *Assist veterans and their family members through establishing or augmenting programs that assist them with access to legal assistance, health care, employment counseling or training, education counseling or training, affordable housing, and other support services.* CNCS grantees provide a host of support services to veterans and military families to address their health and wellness needs. Examples include essential services such as providing transportation to appointments, preparing meals, and providing affordable housing and care for veterans requiring full-time care. CNCS supports 66 grantees providing one or more of the services that come under wellness and other support services.

3) **Are the CNCS funded programs for veterans and military families effective? What are the benefits of the CNCS programs for veterans and military families, if any?**

Following the passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009, CNCS revised its Strategic Plan⁵, its roadmap for using national service to address critical challenges facing our communities and our nation, to include veterans and military families as one of the areas of focus for the agency. Accordingly, CNCS has now recruited more than 27,000 veterans to serve as AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members, helping other veterans and military families access benefits and services; obtain job training and conduct job searches; provide safe and affordable housing; and mentor and tutor children of service members⁶. Data also show a marked increase in AmeriCorps State and National estimated investments in the focus area of veterans and military families⁷.

Several programs involving veterans and military families are currently proposing evaluation studies. Please see Appendix A for some of the programs that have proposed an evaluation design. The Veterans Legal Corps (VLC) Program is an example of a program that has over four years of evaluation findings. VLC seeks to provide legal assistance to low-income and homeless veterans with issues related to disability benefits claims, barriers to housing and employment, debt, family law, and other legal issues, through placement of lawyers and law students across the country. Evaluation reports submitted in 2013⁸ and 2015⁹ found that:

"To this day I see my role in the veteran community as targeting the enemy so the troop can come home. I cannot do anything else because nothing else means anything. I cannot work at a store or sell cars. I cannot study law and be a lawyer. I still feel responsible for those I feel are on my watch. I have spent hours and hours in jails, psych-wards, slums, homeless shelters, Canadian AWOL safe-houses, the VA, etc. My fellow veterans are there and I need to give it everything I have to bring them home.

I would tell others that deal with this sort of thing to first be relieved that they are not the only ones going through it. We did the desert together; we can do this together. Just because you don't wear the uniform anymore doesn't mean that you can hang up your obligation. Reach out to others. When you help others you help yourself. Hang in there, you're needed to make this world a better place. Start with your neighbor, friend, or family member. Start small and you'll see the feelings and confidence you once had will return to you. We are warriors and must live our lives like it."

Mike Pereira, OIF/OEF Veteran
*All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service*³

⁵ https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/11_0203_cnscs_strategic_plan.pdf

⁶ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/focus-areas/veterans-and-military-families>

⁷ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange/Veterans-and-Military-Families>

⁸ https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_Veterans%20Legal%20Corps%20Evaluation%20Report_2013.pdf

⁹ https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/FR_Veterans%20Legal%20Corps%20Program%20Final%20Eval%20Report_2015.pdf

- 491 veterans had a barrier to housing removed and 104 veterans obtained housing; 10 veterans obtained employment or vocational education; 5 reestablished a relationship with their children;
- 89.5% of survey respondents said the program had a positive impact helping to stabilize or otherwise improve the lives of veterans who have been served;
- Served on average 70-100 veterans each year per site, with 87% of clients being assisted to a positive resolution; and
- Obtained for its clients approximately \$851,000.00 during the study year, including found benefits and successful case resolutions. Compared to the \$30,410.00 required to run this program at the treatment site, the evaluator calculated an 8,389% return on investment.

4) What are some successful CNCS evidence-based programs that might work with veteran and military families too?

CNCS has funded research and evaluations for programs in different CNCS's focus areas. Rigorous evaluations using quasi-experimental and experimental research designs, have assessed or are in the midst of assessing the effectiveness and impact of program models on program participants. Although these evidence-based programs have not targeted veterans and their families specifically, these interventions may be worth exploring for several reasons. First, research and rigorous evaluations are demonstrating positive effects for these program participants. Second, the programs have three characteristics that motivate veterans to join national service¹⁰: to fulfill a social need (e.g., empower other veterans); to fulfill a personal need (e.g., continue serving as a civilian); and, to advance professionally (e.g., new opportunities and social connections). Incorporating veterans into any of the focus areas is possible, however, here we highlight programs in three focus areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and environmental stewardship. Please see Appendix B to see a listing of some selected programs under each of these three focus areas.

a. *Economic Opportunity: Reskilling*

A number of evaluation studies on programs funded by the Social Innovation Fund have shown positive impacts for participants in workforce training programs. Similar programs could explicitly include veterans, or be developed to specifically focus on veterans. Examples of two programs are included in Appendix B.

b. *Healthy Futures: Health Service Delivery*

Another set of programs that are less obvious for veterans participating in national service, but may be interesting to consider, is training veterans to be non-clinical lay staff and patient navigators to provide non-clinical health and mental health services to other veterans and their families. For example, the Wounded Warrior initiative (see

¹⁰ CNCS Veterans and Military Families Working Group, PowerPoint Presentation, March 17, 2016.

page 3, 3.IV) could be expanded so that veterans are being trained to provide service to disabled veterans, in addition to just receiving services. CNCS is currently funding programs that include training lay staff (i.e., non-health service providers, AmeriCorps members) to be patient navigators and deliver non-clinical health and mental health interventions. Research and evaluations of these programs are underway. A few programs are described in Appendix B.

c. *Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services*

CNCS's environmental stewardship focus area emphasizes funding and supporting projects engaged in construction or physical improvements related to energy and water performance in economically disadvantaged communities; sustained recycling and waste treatment activities; improvements of at-risk public lands or waterways (beyond general cleanup); creating awareness among economically disadvantaged communities of personal actions to benefit energy and water conservation/efficiency and solid waste recycling; disaster response work, and formal and informal green job training for economically disadvantaged people¹¹. Veterans and military personnel have several valuable skills gained through their military service, such as management and supervision skills, ability to lead diverse groups of people, team-building skills, operational skills, and logistical skills¹², which could serve them well in environmental stewardship projects. In addition, their experience and skills are perfectly suited for disaster preparation and response efforts¹³. AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams (A-DRTs) implement Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Incident Command System (ICS) management structure during deployments that would be familiar to veterans and military personnel¹⁴.

¹¹ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/focus-areas/environmental-stewardship>

¹² http://www.civicenterprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/all_volunteer_force.pdf

¹³ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CNCS%20DSU%20Disaster%20Response%20Framework.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.nationalservice.gov/focus-areas/disaster-services/ameri-corps-disaster-response-teams-drts>

Appendix A

Examples of Evidence-Based AmeriCorps Grantees serving Veterans and Military Families

Listed below are some of the 2015/16 programs serving veterans and military families that have proposed an evaluation design.

University of Maryland

Legacy Corps for Veterans and Military Families

The University of Maryland Legacy Corps for Veteran and Military Families (LCVMF) proposes to have AmeriCorps members who will provide caregiver support services to veteran and military families at 16 sub-award sites in 10 states.

- Members will provide respite and/or other caregiver support services to veterans or families of veterans approximately two times per week.
- Site managers will work with partners to identify and work with family members of veterans or active military two times a week to participate in training and provide service to veterans or family members who require caregiver respite or other support services.
- Members will complete training in areas of respite service as well as AmeriCorps values and they will provide caregiver or other support services to identified families who are in need of respite.

As a result of these activities the grantee expects to see the following changes:

- participating veterans and family members having significantly increased their commitment to their communities
- Decreased caregiver burden and stress
- Increase in number of families who can remain in communities and postpone or avoid institutional care.
- AmeriCorps members will leverage additional volunteers who will be engaged in outreach, caregiver support and food drives.

Equal Justice Works

Veterans Legal Corps

Equal Justice Works (EJW) proposes to have AmeriCorps Members provide legal services for veterans, and other low income individuals, in high need states such as CA, DC, DE, FL, GA, IL, KY, NY, OH, OK, SC, TX, VA, WV and other locales. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps Members will be responsible for the following:

- Minimum-time law students will provide legal services to low-income and homeless veterans—including benefits claims, barriers to housing and employment, elder abuse, child support orders, and other legal issues. Member service will include activities such as client intake and screening; developing and producing legal self-help manuals; developing and providing legal training materials for pro bono lawyers and others providing legal services; and researching and drafting memos to address specific legal problems. Specifically:

- Conduct initial intake of the veteran to identify legal issues needing resolution
- Assemble evidence by interviewing the veteran, obtaining medical and service records and gathering testimony from witnesses
- Review and assess the evidence collected in order to assess which cases are meritorious
- Prepare the case by researching prior court decisions and developing arguments to persuade a judge to rule in favor of the veteran
- Present the case to the court or tribunal
- Members will also leverage an additional 600 volunteers per year to provide additional legal services to veterans.

Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs

Vet Corps

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) will partner with AmeriCorps members who will act as peer mentor/ navigators to veterans and military families at colleges and with community partner sites across Washington State. Activities will include:

- Outreach to veterans and or family members on and off campus,
- Connecting individuals to services and benefits,
- Training for faculty, staff, administrators and community stakeholder on veterans' cultural competency and veterans' transition increasing success in veterans' transition from military service.
- In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 2,000 volunteers that will be engaged in service projects that support and raise awareness of veterans' across Washington State.

University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh

Vet Corps

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Vet Corps proposes to have 20 quarter-time Vet Corps members who will serve veterans and military family members in a five-county area of northeast Wisconsin. Activities will include:

- Vet Corps members will be placed at service sites based on a fit with skill-set, interest, or passion gathered through a pre-placement survey and interview to gain more knowledge of the member interests, training needs and areas that integration can be improved.
- A training schedule will be developed based on survey responses, and members will complete training evaluations to provide further feedback. Areas of training will include: orientation, volunteer management, civic engagement, communication skills, team building, first aid/CPR, veteran resources, recognizing PTSD and other mental health issues, suicide prevention, mentoring, stress management and conflict resolution.
- Members will keep a journal for reflection on their day-to-day service experiences and submit at least one reflection piece during their term. They will receive pre- and post-surveys to measure the impact of Vet Corps participation on their knowledge and involvement in the community.

- Members will also complete a volunteer log to track the number of unduplicated volunteers managed and recruited by each Vet Corps member that completed the service activity, and the number of hours each volunteer served.
- In addition, the Vet Corps members will leverage an additional 300 volunteers who will be engaged in a variety of activities including disaster response, agricultural cultivation, college veteran advisement, refugee assistance, and early education enhancement.

Mt. Adams Institute

VetsWork: Environment

The Mt. Adams Institute (MAI) proposes to have members who will engage in one of its two career development and stewardship programs (VetsWork Environment, VetsWork GreenCorps and Public Lands Stewards) focused on public lands and natural resources management in eleven states: WA, OR, MO, AR, IL, IN, VA, WV, NC, SC and GA. Activities will include:

- Members will focus on improving acres of public lands.
- Members will complete a monthly site report form which is then reviewed and approved by their agency supervisor.

As a result of their service, members will:

- Be responsible for having developed skills, knowledge and professional networks that will help them secure permanent employment in the sector.
- Have improved over 1500 acres of public lands and
- Have built/maintained over 800 miles of public hiking trails.

Conservation Legacy

VFA

Conservation Legacy and the Student Conservation Association (SCA) propose to have AmeriCorps members who will complete forest fire mitigation and restoration through fire fuels reduction, pile burning, prescribed burns and fireline construction at ten sites in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, South Dakota, Washington and Wyoming. Activities will include:

- Fuels reduction and thinning projects on public lands
- Conduct include prescribed burns, pile burns and fireline construction
- On the job training, support, mentorship and multiple formal certifications for veteran AmeriCorps Members
- Provide improvements 3,200 acres of public lands.

Tse Daa Kaan Chapter of the Navajo Nation

Tse Daa Kaan New Project FY16

The Tse Daa K'aan Chapter of the Navajo Nation proposes to have AmeriCorps members to provide assistance to veterans and military families in Hogback, New Mexico. Activities will include:

- Development of a resource center within the Chapter House for assistance in accessing needed resources.

- Work with veterans or military families to connect them with community resources such as transportation.
- Members will also work with the community, veterans and military families to do minor home repairs and/or weatherization of their homes.
- Outreach and engagement to veterans/families throughout in Chapter House projects, activities and cultural events. Members will maintain contact and support for the veterans and military families, helping to manage their consistent and productive volunteerism.
- Leverage an additional 40 volunteers who will be engaged in working with the veterans and military families.

Appendix B

Examples of CNCS Funded Programs that could serve Veterans and Military Families

Economic Opportunity: Reskilling

Jobs for the Future

Social Innovation Fund Grantee

Using a quasi-experimental design, this impact study provides strong evidence for the workforce training field on the value and relative effectiveness of sector-based training for unemployed individuals in healthcare, manufacturing, and construction in Cincinnati, OH and Milwaukee, WI.

- For the most part, these sector based programs had large effects on employment, was effective in helping participants obtain healthcare jobs, had a large effect on earnings, and job retention.

WorkAdvance, Mayor's Fund

Social Innovation Fund Grantee

This program seeks to meet the needs of both workers and employers by preparing individuals for quality jobs in specific high-demand industries or occupational clusters. In addition to providing pre-employment and career readiness services, occupational skills training, and job development and placement services, the program also offers post-employment retention and advancement services designed to increase workers' prospects for sustained employment and upward mobility.

- A randomized controlled trial study demonstrated that WorkAdvance significantly increased employment in the target sector at all providers. These findings show that WorkAdvance succeeded in improving participants' earnings and improving outcomes across a variety of job quality measures. In particular, the program made a significant difference for the long-term unemployed.

Healthy Futures: Health Service Delivery

AmeriCorps and the Medically Underserved

AmeriCorps Grantee

This is an AmeriCorps program developed by Utah's Primary Care Association, the Association for Utah Community Health. AmeriCorps members were placed in a host clinic attempted to increase enrolment of eligible children in Medicaid/Chip. The objectives of this program was to determine whether Case Management (CM) by AmeriCorps Members (ACM) resulted in increased enrollment of eligible Latino children in Medicaid/CHIP; to identify the factors associated with non-enrollment among families utilizing CM, to compare the utilization of preventive and acute primary care services by enrolled and non-enrolled children.

- Compared to a control group, children in the CM group were much more likely to be successfully enrolled in Medicaid/CHIP. A greater proportion of enrolled children in each age

group completed the recommended number of preventive visits in the six months following state determination of enrollment compared to children who were not enrolled. The study determined that case management by AmeriCorps Members is a low-cost, effective approach to increasing access to care for Latino children.

Association for Clinicians of the Underserved (ACFU)

2017 AmeriCorps Evidence-based Planning Grantee

The ACFU was awarded funds to develop a program in which AmeriCorps members will be trained as patient navigators to implement evidence-based patient centered interventions such as case management assistance coverage enrollment, accessing primary care services, and awareness/effective utilization of health care resources across the respective individuals continuum of care.

- During this planning year, the grantee will also develop an evaluation plan and recruit a third-party evaluator to assess the program and its outcomes.

University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center and Case Western University

AmeriCorps Grantee/National Service and Civic Engagement Research Grantee

Health care institutions, such as hospitals, are looking for opportunities to deliver different types of counseling or coaching to patients such as after a hospital stay to reduce readmissions, or to successfully finish treatment, however, costs are prohibitive. To make an impact successfully helping patients quit smoking, AmeriCorps members are being trained in motivational interviewing to become health coaches and counsel patients to quit smoking after a doctor's diagnosis and proposed treatment.

- Case Western is presently conducting a mixed method study to conduct an evaluation of the program including ability for AmeriCorps members to deliver the counseling as well the rate of smoking cessation. They are also developing an online toolkit for motivation interviewing and providing it for other institutions to use.

Connections to Care (C2C) Model, Mayor's Fund

Social Innovation Fund Grantee

This program proposes to broaden access and use of mental health services by implementing a model of service delivery known as task-shifting, a way of expanding the mental health workforce by training lay staff, such as non-health service providers, in the delivery of non-clinical mental health interventions. The intervention aims to: improve mental health outcomes of participants; increase up-take and retention of participants receiving mental health services; reduce avoidable hospitalizations and emergency room visits; increase the health stability of participants; increase participants' ability to achieve other targeted program-specific outcomes in areas such as employment and education; and sustainably maintain proficient use of skills in evidence-based practices by the clinic's staff. The intervention also aims to reduce individuals' health care spending and to decrease government outlays.

- The evaluation is targeting a moderate level of evidence using a quasi-experimental design with propensity score weighting to improve comparability between treatment and comparison groups.

Environmental Stewardship and Disaster Services

Conservation Corps Minnesota and Iowa

AmeriCorps Grantee

AmeriCorps members participate in habitat restoration, trail building and disaster response for community health, safety, and well-being; deliver healthy eating curriculum and get hands-on experience cooking healthy foods.

- The proposed outcome measure is ecosystem health.

Utah Conservation Corps

AmeriCorps Grantee

AmeriCorps members complete environmental stewardship projects throughout the state of Utah including:

- Restoring habitat, and improving trail
- Providing environmental education presentations to students to increase environmentally-conscious behavior

Proposed outcome measures include:

- Habitat health and water quality
- Visitor experience
- Environmental knowledge

WA State Department of Ecology

AmeriCorps Grantee

AmeriCorps members will:

- Remove invasive species and install native plants to improve habitat for fish and wildlife
- Increase access and safety through construction or improvement of trails
- Reduce the risk of floods and wildfires through forest health management
- Assist in disaster responses

Proposed outcome measures include:

- Habitat health
- Environmental stewardship and responsibility